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# Harvests Increase by Thirty Percent

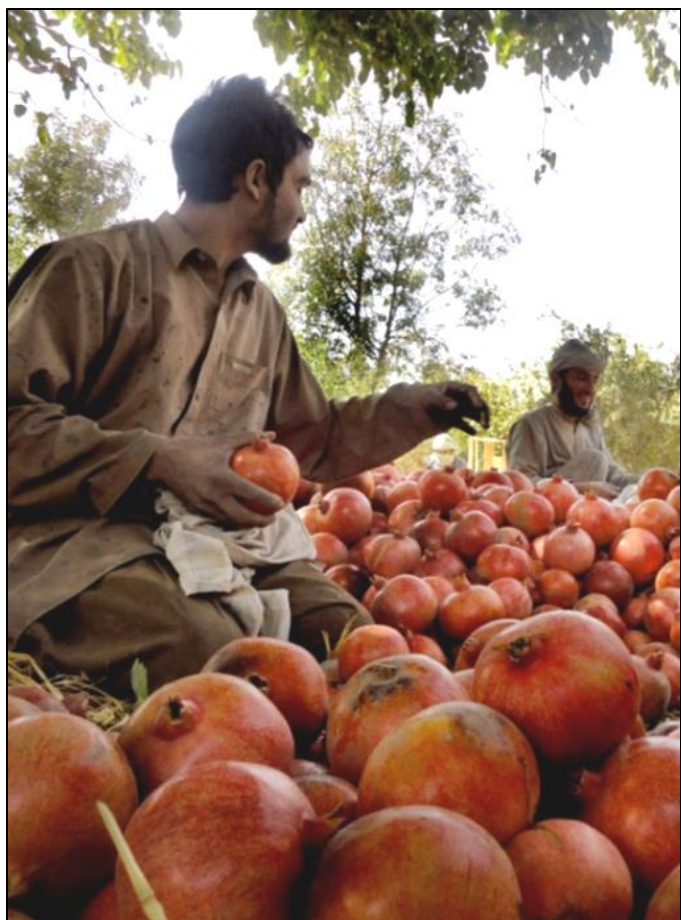


Photo: USAID/IRD AVIPA Plus

It's harvest time again in Arghandab, in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar. At an orchard near the village of Mian Juy, pickers on high pomegranate branches drop fruit into the hands of waiting packers. Zahir Shah, a local buyer, moves among them, tabulating numbers on a clipboard. He's been buying pomegranates wholesale for seven years, and he says he's never seen a harvest like this one.

"The numbers are way up, and the quality of the fruit is better than ever," said Zahir.

He attributes this to reduced pests, better irrigation, and pruning, all components of an intensive, multi-prong effort by USAID's Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus project to improve the orchards of the Arghandab Valley.

Arghandab was once a global player in pomegranate production, but three decades of war left its orchards in ruins. AVIPA Plus employed hundreds of laborers to prune damaged and neglected orchards. Farmers received more than half a million saplings to replace trees lost to drought and disease. Irrigation clean-up projects brought water to thirsty farms. Additionally, farmers were trained in the latest pest management techniques, including simple, eco-friendly methods that can eradicate infestations with just soap and water.

**Orchard workers pack pomegranates for export. Orchard management projects funded by USAID are contributing to bigger harvests and higher-quality fruit in Arghandab.**

According to an Afghan official in Arghandab, pomegranate harvests in the district are up approximately 30 percent from last year, and the improved quality has increased market prices by 33 percent.

That's good news to buyers like Zahir Shah and the workers he employs. He sells his produce to countries throughout the region, including Pakistan, India, and the United Arab Emirates. "They have high standards. They buy only the best fruit."

He breaks open a pomegranate for inspection. "Yes, this is good. They'll like this in Dubai."